United Nations A/56/453

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 October 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Agenda item 115
Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly, in accordance with section VIII of Assembly resolution 54/149 of 25 February 2000, the report prepared by Olara A. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

* Submission of the present report was delayed in order to include relevant significant developments which had been scheduled for the second half of September 2001 in connection with the special session of the General Assembly on children but which were eventually postponed.

01-57351 (E) 181001

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, in which the General Assembly recommended that the Secretary-General appoint the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for a period of three years and requested the Special Representative to submit to it an annual report containing relevant information on the situation of children affected by armed conflict, and Assembly resolution 54/149 of 17 December 1999, by which it recommended the extension of the mandate of the Special Representative for a further period of three years. The present report is the fourth annual report submitted by the Special Representative and covers the activities undertaken during the reporting period of October 2000 to end-September 2001.

2. The present report should be read in conjunction with the second report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/56/342-S/2001/852), which was submitted simultaneously to the General Assembly in September 2001. The Special Representative served as focal point for the preparation of that report, and should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly in particular to the relevant action points made therein and propose their consideration as recommendations when the present report is discussed.

3. The present report was intended in part to relate a number of important events on behalf of children affected by armed conflict, which were to take place in September 2001 but which have been deferred owing to the terrorist attacks on the United States of America, on 11 September. In particular, 19 September was to mark the opening of the much awaited and long-planned three-day special session of the General Assembly on children, during which particular attention was to be accorded to the plight of war-affected children. On the same day, the Security Council was to convene a summit meeting on children and armed conflict, with the participation of some eight heads of State and Government. The Security Council, under the leadership of the President of France, Jacques Chirac, had hoped to adopt a ground-breaking resolution embodying new commitments to protect children in situations of armed conflict and conferring additional obligations on concerned actors. The open debate by the General Assembly at its special session on children and by the Security Council will both take place in due course. In the meantime, we must all reflect on the implications of the events of 11 September on our work, including activities on behalf of war-affected children.

II. Building a movement for the protection of war-affected children

4. The two reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/55/163-S/2000/712 and A/56/342-S/2001/852) and the three previous annual reports of the Special Representative transmitted to the General Assembly (A/53/482, A/54/430, annex, and A/55/442) have reviewed the many aspects of children's suffering in times of armed conflict, including child soldiers and child abduction; separation, displacement and loss of loved ones; sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly of girls; physical injury and psychosocial trauma; long-term rehabilitation and reconciliation; the spread of HIV/AIDS in the corridors of armed conflicts; and the loss of schooling and health care.

5. In his third report to the General Assembly (A/55/442), the Special Representative outlined the progress that had been achieved in moving forward the agenda of children and armed conflict: advocacy and awareness had increased significantly; children and armed conflict had been placed high on the international political agenda; major regional organizations had adopted the issue as part of their agendas; the Security Council had become actively engaged in the issue of children and armed conflict, underscored by adoption of its landmark resolutions 1261 (1999) of 25 August 1999 and 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000, in which the Council affirmed the protection of children affected by armed conflict as a peace and security concern; the well-being of children in situations of armed conflict was being included in peace agendas and had become a priority concern in post-conflict peace-building; international standards had been strengthened;[1] warring parties had made concrete commitments for the protection of children; children's concerns were being integrated into United Nations peace operations, through mandates, reports, child protection advisers and training; and there had been major growth in advocacy and programme activities by non-governmental organizations, focusing on children affected by armed conflict.

6. In spite of this progress, a great deal more remains to be done to ensure the effective protection and rehabilitation of children in times of war. In developing an agenda for the second three-year tranche of the mandate, the Special Representative has placed particular emphasis on follow-up activities with regard to the progress made in the areas indicated above, on consolidating and deepening those gains, and on ensuring that emerging trends become fully embedded and self-sustaining practices. This vision, described in his previous report to the General Assembly, has now been translated into the Special Representative's work plan for the period 2001-2003.

7. All activities outlined in the work plan presuppose and entail extensive collaboration with key actors and partners, in particular the Security Council, regional organizations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat, United Nations country teams, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. Each activity is designed to bring together key partners within a framework of collaboration. Many of the activities involve a division of labour, whereby the Office of the Special Representative plays a catalytic and facilitating role by proposing and articulating the initiatives, and facilitating their conception and development, while leaving the implementation of the resultant activities to the appropriate actors.

8. During the current reporting period, the Special Representative and long-standing donors agreed that it was important that the resources and staffing placed at the disposal of the Special Representative are adequate for taking forward his activities in the most effective manner. In this connection, it was agreed that additional staff capacity was essential for the work of the Office. As this reporting period closes, several new staff members are taking up their posts, while remaining posts are in the process of being filled.

III. Activities and initiatives undertaken in the past year

A. Ensuring the integration of issues related to children and armed conflict into all aspects of international peace and security

1. Security Council

9. The Security Council has played an increasingly active role in the protection of children affected by armed conflict and the Office of the Special Representative continues to work closely with Council members on this agenda. During the reporting period, concern was expressed in seven Security Council resolutions and several presidential statements and open debates integrated concern for the plight of children affected by armed conflict. Relevant country-specific resolutions were adopted, including those on the situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the situation concerning Sierra Leone, while thematic resolutions were concerned with, for example, women, peace and security, and the prevention of armed conflict. In addition, some 30 reports submitted to the Security Council contained information and recommendations on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. These included reports on country situations, such as those on East Timor, Western Sahara and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and on issues such as the protection of civilians in armed conflict, small arms and light weapons, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

10. During its missions to war-affected countries, undertaken with the encouragement of the Special Representative, UNICEF and other partners, including non-governmental organizations, the Security Council has made it a practice to look into and express concern for child-specific issues. The Office of the Special Representative participated in oral briefings and provided a briefing paper on juvenile justice and the Special Court for Sierra Leone in advance of the Council's mission to Sierra Leone in October 2000. The mission report submitted to the Council (S/2000/992) reflects the concern over whether and how violations committed against, and sometimes by, children during the armed conflict in Sierra Leone would be addressed by the Court and the truth and reconciliation commission. The Office of the Special Representative also briefed the Council prior to its

mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in May 2001; again, the Council paid explicit attention to the aforementioned issues during and after its visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries.

11. The Special Representative has helped to ensure that the Security Council keeps children's concerns at the forefront of its efforts to restore peace and security to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In resolution 1341 (2001) of 22 February 2001, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to entrust the Special Representative with overseeing compliance with the demand that child soldiers be demobilized speedily, returned and rehabilitated. The Special Representative gave a formal briefing to the Council upon his return from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June 2001. Subsequently, the Council incorporated a number of concrete child protection elements into the renewed mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in June 2001. Specifically, in resolution 1355 (2001) of 15 June 2001, the Council called on all relevant parties to ensure that urgent child protection concerns were addressed in all national, bilateral and regional dialogues and that child soldiers were expeditiously demobilized, and urged Member States to ensure adequate and sustained resources for long-term reintegration. Further, the Council called upon the Secretary-General to ensure sufficient deployment of child protection advisers within MONUC.

12. Additional child protection advisers will soon be deployed to relieve the currently over-stretched child protection section of MONUC. The Security Council has demonstrated its continued commitment to resolution 1314 (2000), in which it had reaffirmed its readiness to deploy child protection advisers as appropriate. The Office of the Special Representative has been working actively with UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to ensure the recruitment of suitably qualified personnel into the child protection section of MONUC.

13. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1314 (2000), the Secretary-General submitted his second report on children and armed conflict to the Council on 4 September 2001 (S/2001/852-A/56/342). The Office of the Special Representative served as focal point for the preparation of the report, which sets forth several important measures intended to protect children during and after armed conflict. The report, prepared in close collaboration with UNICEF and drawing upon input from a broad group of United Nations and non-governmental partners, also informs the Security Council of actions under way to ensure implementation of the previous recommendations of the Secretary-General and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and proposes additional key actions that need to be taken.

14. On the basis of the report of the Secretary-General, members of the Council had begun discussion on the content of a new resolution on children and armed conflict, under the French presidency in September. Deliberations were under way on a ground-breaking draft resolution that would assign new initiatives to a number of actors, including Member States, international financial institutions, regional organizations, the United Nations and the Council itself. Plans for an open debate leading to a Security Council summit meeting on children and armed conflict on 19 September were well under way before the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September. Although the open debate has not yet been rescheduled, members of the Council continued with their deliberations on a draft resolution throughout September, a tribute to the leadership provided by France and the commitment of the Security Council as a whole to the plight of war-affected children.

2. Incorporating child protection into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes

15. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to work with the Security Council, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF with the aim of ensuring the incorporation of child protection into the mandates and staffing tables of peacekeeping operations. The Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF are working together to identify child protection staff for deployment to the expanded child protection section of MONUC, to comply with the request of the Security Council, in resolution 1355 (2001), to ensure consistent and systematic monitoring and reporting on the conduct of the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as concerns their child protection obligations under humanitarian and human rights law and the commitments they have made to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

16. When he addressed the Preparatory Committee on the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children in June 2001, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations proposed the formation of an informal inter-agency working group to evaluate the lessons learned regarding the incorporation of child protection into peacekeeping operations to date, and to explore how these efforts might be supported in the future, particularly at the stage of peace negotiations. The Special Representative welcomed this proposal, which had been the subject of ongoing dialogue with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for some time and which is reflected in the work plan for the period 2001-2003. It has now been agreed that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and the Department of Political Affairs will jointly convene an inter-agency working group to strengthen ongoing initiatives to incorporate child protection into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes.

17. In March 2001, the Special Representative participated in a seminar of current special and personal representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General, on the issue of enhancing the implementation of United Nations peace operations. The Special Representative's participation in the meeting of a panel which focused on the integration of human rights issues into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building missions offered an opportunity to encourage the representatives and envoys to strengthen the incorporation of child rights and protection into their activities and operations.

3. Providing training for peacekeeping personnel

18. The Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and Radda Barnen, in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, have formed an informal working group on training in child protection for peacekeeping personnel in order to ensure the implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendation that all personnel in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building operations be given training on the rights and protection of children, including guidance as dilemmas arise in the discharge of their functions. The Secretary-General has also recommended the Member States ensure that their military, civilian and police personnel involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations be trained with regard to international human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law, especially as concerns the rights and protection of children and women, in advance of troop deployment to United Nations operations.

19. The principal objective of the working group is to produce and pilot a complete training resource package for use in all United Nations peace operations. The package will be compiled in such a way that it can easily be adapted to the mandate of a particular mission and flexibly employed to train staff of the various mission components, such as military observers, peacekeeping troops, civilian police, and human rights and humanitarian personnel.

20. The working group, comprised of representatives of key United Nations partners, non-governmental and international organizations, representatives of regional organizations and Member States, and individual experts, held its first meeting in New York, on 30 and 31 May 2001, to share experience and relevant training materials. A set of core training materials will be piloted during a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the field in 2002. Ultimately, the materials will be made available for distribution, including via CD-ROM. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has indicated that it will include these materials in their evolving plans to strengthen the training of its civilians, as well as uniformed personnel.

21. The training package might eventually be made available to other international and regional organizations with similar operations in the field, and to troop-contributing Member States to encourage training of personnel prior to their deployment to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

4. Eliminating impunity in relation to crimes against children

22. The need to address impunity and to bring to justice those responsible for violations of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict continues to be a particular preoccupation. The second report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, on children and armed conflict (A/56/342-S/2001/852), contains a number of pertinent recommendations, including appeals for sufficient funding for international projects for seeking truth and justice and for provision to be made for such efforts in peacekeeping mandates. The Secretary-General also called for systematic attention to be paid within such mechanisms to the full range of

children's wartime experiences, the circumstances that allow such abuses to occur, and the long-term interventions required to ensure rehabilitation and reintegration.

23. The recommendations made in the first report of the Secretary-General (A/55/163-S/2000/712) remain pertinent, in particular the call for greater cooperation among Member States in tracking the movements and activities of individuals accused of war crimes, and the need to devote resources to rebuilding national juvenile justice systems, in particular for cases in which children are indicted for wartime offences.

Impunity, truth and justice in Sierra Leone

24. The Office of the Special Representative contributed a number of proposals and convened discussion groups on the establishment and functioning of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, specifically as concerns the involvement of children in the Court's proceedings as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of grave abuses during the war in that country.

25. The Office joined UNICEF and several non-governmental organizations in a successful effort to ensure that the Court's jurisdiction included the war crime of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities. The adoption of the formulation of this crime, codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court should help to ensure that greater attention is given to the prosecution of child recruiters, and help to deter such abuse in the future.

26. The Office also launched and facilitated an important international debate on the issue of accountability for those who were between 15 and 18 years of age at the time that they were alleged to have committed serious crimes. It is the view of the Special Representative that some children, and young adults who committed grave crimes as adolescents, can benefit from participation in a process that ensures accountability for one's actions, respects the procedural guarantees appropriate in the administration of juvenile justice, and takes into account the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and capacity to assume a constructive role in society. Others advocated for the exclusion altogether from the Court's jurisdiction of persons under the age of 18 years, and favoured an approach that stresses participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and programmes targeting war-affected children. After much discussion, the principles of juvenile justice were retained within the statute of the Special Court and it was determined that if a person between 15 and 18 years of age at the time of the alleged commission of the crime comes before the Court, he or she shall be treated with dignity and a sense of worth, and in accordance with international human rights standards. Imprisonment is not an option in the disposition of his or her case, but rather the Court shall determine the most appropriate alternative programme or service.

27. The Special Representative has sought over the past year to explore and promote a common ground among those engaged in this discussion, all of whom have a common interest, namely, securing the protection of the rights and well-being of the children affected by war in Sierra Leone. In November 2000, he hosted a round-table meeting of United Nations agencies and departments, non-governmental organizations and independent experts, providing an opportunity for participants to voice their concerns and perspectives. In January 2001, his Office hosted a second meeting of the same actors to discuss how the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission might operate to advance the best interests of children in a complementary and mutually supportive manner, consistent with their distinct but related functions.

Role of children in post-conflict processes that seek truth and justice

28. While it is clear that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court in Sierra Leone, the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor and similar mechanisms elsewhere should play important roles in the lives of children affected by armed conflict, there is no precedent to follow to ensure that children will avail themselves of, or benefit from, these procedures. The community of concerned actors and experts is at present seeking to gain the insights necessary to provide concrete child-centred guidance during the development of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals, while bearing in mind the overarching objectives of social reintegration, rehabilitation and reconciliation in a post-conflict society.

29. The Special Representative is seeking to address this knowledge gap in the long term, in part through a

research network described below and, more immediately, through the convening of a series of expert meetings on child protection within the context of truth and justice-seeking mechanisms. The first such meeting, held in New York in May 2001, brought together researchers, academics and practitioners in the areas of child development, juvenile justice and child-welfare programming.

5. Regional organizations and other groups

30. The Special Representative has continued his efforts to deepen the integration of the agenda on war-affected children into the work of various regional organizations, in particular the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and of the Group of Eight major industrialized countries.

31. The Special Representative has continued to work with the European Union and its Council in advancing the agenda of children affected by armed conflict. In November 2000, the Special Representative visited Brussels, where he held discussions with the Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Development and Cooperation, the Chair of the Joint Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Union, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, and the Director of the Humanitarian Aid Office of the European Commission (ECHO). He urged the allocation of more resources for the benefit of children in situations of armed conflict. He discussed how progress might be achieved towards implementing the provision of the Cotonou Agreement concerning the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. He also raised several initiatives in which he invited the Commission to engage, including the proposal for an independent "observatory" to monitor compliance with obligations and commitments to protect war-affected children, the research agenda and the Voice of Children initiative.

32. During its presidency of the European Union, Sweden highlighted the protection of children affected by armed conflict as an important issue on the agenda. The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened a high-level seminar, on the theme "Children affected by armed conflict and forced displacement: a child rights perspective in development cooperation and migration policies", at Norrköping, Sweden, in March 2001. The Special Representative and the Executive Director of UNICEF were among the participants in the seminar, which aimed to promote greater awareness and action within the European Union. The conclusions of the seminar contain important recommendations for action on behalf of war-affected children; these were shared at the European preparatory meeting for the special session of the General Assembly on children, held at Berlin in May 2001, and at the meeting of the Group of Eight, held at Genoa, Italy, in July 2001.

33. Following his proposal of an agenda for dialogue with OSCE on children affected by armed conflict at the OSCE review conference held at Istanbul in November 1999, and his proposals made at the OSCE human dimension seminar convened at Warsaw in May 2000, which was devoted to the issue of children affected by armed conflict, the Special Representative has strongly supported efforts within OSCE to develop a specific framework for the integration of the agenda on children and armed conflict into its work. The Special Representative participated in the OSCE Ministerial Council, held at Vienna in November 2000, at which the document on the protection of the rights of children, particularly of children affected by armed conflict, was tabled for adoption. The Special Representative expresses regret that this important document was not adopted at Vienna; he continues to work closely with other partners with a view to overcoming the present difficulties.

34. The Office of the Special Representative continued to work with ECOWAS on the implementation of the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action, which resulted from the Conference on War-Affected Children convened by the Governments of Ghana and Canada at Accra, in April 2000. Plans have progressed towards the establishment of an ECOWAS child protection unit. Following a needs-assessment mission to ECOWAS in August 2000, which was led by Canada and in which the Office of the Special Representative actively participated, an agreement was signed in April 2001 to establish the Unit. ECOWAS is now in the process of recruiting a special adviser on children.

35. The Special Representative has been in consultation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region in Africa with a view to ensuring that child protection issues will

be fully integrated into the agenda of the proposed regional conference for the Great Lakes region.

36. In November 2000, the Special Representative held consultations with the Government of Japan at Tokyo, in follow-up to the Miyazaki Initiatives for Conflict Prevention, adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the Group of Eight in July 2000 (see A/55/161-S/2000/714). He was subsequently invited to address a working group meeting of the Group of Eight in London, at which he presented proposals on an independent body to monitor compliance with commitments on child protection made by parties to armed conflicts, the Voice of Children initiative, the Children to Children networks and the research agenda. In April 2001, he met with the Prime Minister of Italy and senior governmental officials in Rome to promote continued attention to child protection concerns in the context of the deliberations of the Group of Eight.

37. The Special Representative participated in the fourth high-level meeting held between the United Nations and regional organizations in February 2001, and proposed specific measures by which regional organizations could integrate the agenda on children affected by armed conflict into their activities.

B. Strengthening and enhancing adherence to international norms and standards

1. Signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

38. In the reporting period, the Special Representative has made the signature and ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the subject of a systematic campaign. At the time of completion of the present report, there were 83 signatories to the Protocol and 6 States had ratified it, namely, Andorra, Bangladesh, Canada, Iceland, Panama and Sri Lanka. The Special Representative and UNICEF have embarked on a campaign intended to help bring the Optional Protocol into force with the requisite 10 ratifications as rapidly as possible. In July 2001, the Special Representative and the Executive Director of UNICEF appealed jointly, in letters addressed to some 30 heads of State or Government, for expeditious ratification. The joint appeal was prepared in collaboration with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, whose relentless work continues to be at the forefront of efforts to bring the Optional Protocol into force. In response to the joint appeal, several heads of State indicated their intention to deposit instruments of ratification during the special session of the General Assembly on children.

39. The Special Representative addresses a special appeal to Member States which have not yet done so to expedite their ratification of the Optional Protocol in order to meet the conditions necessary for its entry into force in time for the rescheduled special session of the General Assembly on children.

40. During the visit of the Special Representative to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government announced its ratification of the Optional Protocol. In August 2001, the Special Representative attended the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held at Durban, South Africa, where he discussed with governmental delegations and representatives of non-governmental organizations the agenda on children affected by armed conflict, including the Optional Protocol. Similarly, at the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union held at Ouagadougou in September 2001, he proposed the engagement of the Union in the agenda on children affected by armed conflict and took the opportunity to again press for ratification of the Optional Protocol (see also para. 51 below).

2. Establishing a system to enhance compliance by parties to conflict with obligations and commitments

41. Over the past four years, a number of commitments on the protection of children in situations of armed conflict have been obtained by the Special Representative and other partners from various parties to conflict. While some of these commitments have been adhered to, many have not. There is clearly a need for more systematic monitoring of and reporting on the conduct of parties to armed conflict and their compliance with the applicable legal obligations and the commitments that they have made. In this connection, the Special Representative has proposed the organization of an observatory, which may be affiliated with an independent research institution, to monitor and report systematically on the conduct and

adherence of parties to armed conflict with relevant commitments.

42. The Special Representative welcomes the efforts of several key actors to bring pressure to bear on parties to armed conflict in order to elicit compliance with child protection commitments and obligations. Examples of such efforts include the discussion held earlier in 2001 between the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, during which the Deputy Executive Director urged compliance with the commitments made to the Special Representative in 1998, and the efforts of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and UNICEF to ensure the release by the Revolutionary United Front and the Civil Defence Forces in Sierra Leone of children in their custody. These efforts are related in greater detail in paragraphs 68 to 70 below.

C. Special session of the General Assembly on children

43. Throughout the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative has worked closely with Member States, the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations to articulate and advance the children and armed conflict agenda ror the special session of the General Assembly on children.

44. In January 2001, in an address to the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children at its second substantive session, the Special Representative presented an agenda for action to protect war-affected children, in which he outlined a 10-point agenda for discussion and action in the context of the special session. The Office of the Special Representative co-hosted the meeting of a panel in January 2001, which reviewed the progress made towards the improved protection of children affected by armed conflict over the past decade and encouraged delegates to the session of the Preparatory Committee to give vigorous support to the proposed agenda for action. The Special Representative also jointly moderated, with a former child soldier from Sierra Leone, a panel meeting on the participation of young people in the protection of war-affected children. In February 2001, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative jointly convened a panel with a view to urging Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Special Representative also engaged extensively with caucuses of non-governmental organizations and youth delegates to the session of the Preparatory Committee.

45. The Office of the Special Representative contributed substantially to the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" (A/S-27/3); a significant part of the report (sect. II.B) is devoted to the issue of children affected by armed conflict.

46. In June 2001, during the third substantive session of the Preparatory Committee, the Special Representative moderated a panel on children and armed conflict. The panel, comprised of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Legal Affairs Director of ECOWAS, a former commander of the Frente Farabundo Martı para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) and participant in the peace process in El Salvador, and a Colombian youth advocate. The Special Representative also co-hosted and participated in a panel to launch the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers global survey on the use of children as soldiers.

47. The report of the Secretary-General and the agenda for action proposed by the Special Representative informed consultations among delegations working to conclude the outcome document. At the time of drafting of the present report, both the section on children and armed conflict of the outcome document and the document itself were near completion. The Special Representative appeals to Member States to retain the momentum that has developed for the special session and the outcome document.

D. Engaging civil society and non-governmental organizations

48. The level of engagement of civil society, opinion makers, communities of faith, women's organizations and non-governmental organizations with the issue of children affected by armed conflict is crucial to the realization of a universal movement for the protection of war-affected children. The Special Representative

has continued to reach out to these constituencies at the local, national and international levels.

Opinion makers

49. In Tokyo, in November 2000, the Special Representative addressed and participated in a workshop, on "Children and armed conflict: reintegration of former soldiers in the post-conflict community", organized by the Government of Japan, Search for Common Ground and the Foundation for Advanced Studies in International Development.

50. At Petra, Jordan, in May 2001, the Special Representative participated in the ministerial meeting of the Human Security Network, an informal caucus of 13 like-minded countries committed to promoting issues of human security. He put forward a set of proposals that would constitute an ongoing agenda of engagement for the Network with children affected by armed conflict.

51. In September 2001, the Special Representative travelled to Ouagadougou to deliver a message from the Secretary-General at the 106th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. As mentioned in paragraph 40 above, he took the opportunity to propose an agenda for the ongoing engagement of the Union with the agenda on children affected by armed conflict. He also called upon the parliamentarians to assist in the campaign to elicit compliance by parties to armed conflict with their child protection obligations and commitments, to provide significant budgetary allocations for war-affected children, and to expedite the ratification of the Optional Protocol in their respective parliaments.

52. A symposium on children and armed conflict was jointly organized by the Office of the Special Representative and the Holy See Mission to the United Nations at United Nations Headquarters, on 5 June 2001. The gathering, chaired by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, brought together young people, religious groups, non-governmental organizations, governmental representatives and United Nations participants. Children from Colombia, Kosovo and Sierra Leone shared their experience of war. The Apostolic Nuncio of the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations delivered a special message from Pope John Paul II. Among the participants were the President of the General Assembly, the Advisor to the Minister of the Canadian International Development Agency on matters relating to war-affected children throughout the world, representatives of non-governmental organizations, the Special Representative and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. The event was covered by representatives of the United Nations press corps, and a long segment was televised on CNN.

53. After the International Conference on War-Affected Children, the Government of Canada convened a Steering Committee, comprised of representatives of the Governments of Canada and Ghana, UNICEF, the Office of the Special Representative, selected non-governmental organizations and young people to develop follow-on initiatives. This Committee has focused on facilitating the speedy ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol, and preparations for the special session on children. The Committee has met in the context of the sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, and also in context of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, and it plans further initiatives on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.

54. The Special Representative delivered the keynote address at the Summit of African First Ladies, convened by the First Lady of Rwanda at Kigali, in May 2001. He used this occasion to urge the African First Ladies to be at the forefront of the campaign for the protection and rehabilitation of children in situations of armed conflict and suggested a number of activities in which they might engage.

Non-governmental organizations

55. The Special Representative has continued to place a particular priority on engagement with non-governmental organizations.

56. During his visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda in May 2001, he met extensively with non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. In the course of preparing for and during the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July 2001, the Office of the Special Representative worked within the Coordinated Action on Small Arms (CASA) mechanism and the caucus on children and small arms, and hosted side events

together with UNICEF and several non-governmental organizations, including a panel on children and armed conflict and a programme on children affected by armed conflict.

57. In August 2001, the Special Representative participated in the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance to highlight the linkage between racism and the victimization of children in the context of armed conflict. His Office convened a panel, on the theme "Double jeopardy: the impact of racism and armed conflict on children", together with several non-governmental organizations, including the International League for Human Rights; the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church; the Resource Centre for Black Women and the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations.

58. The Special Representative has continued to work closely with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in the campaign to obtain rapid ratification and entry into force of the Optional Protocol.

59. During the preparation of the second report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/56/342-S/2001/852), the Office of the Special Representative solicited and obtained the input of leading non-governmental organizations and non-governmental coalitions.

60. The Special Representative has held consultations with a number of non-governmental organizations on his proposal for the establishment of a research network. In this connection, he invited the International Save the Children Alliance and World Vision to be the convenors of the workshop on the research agenda, held in Italy in July 2001. The research agenda and research network are discussed in section G below.

61. Radda Barnen is convening, together with the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF, the informal inter-agency group on child protection training for peacekeeping personnel. A number of other non-governmental organizations are participating in the working group.

62. The Office of the Special Representative has worked closely with a number of non-governmental organizations, including Save the Children, Free the Children, War Child and Global Kids, to promote initiatives for increasing the participation of young people in advocacy on behalf of war-affected children.

63. The Special Representative addressed a number of prominent non-governmental forums during the reporting period, including the annual award dinner of the Lawyers's Committee for Human Rights, held in October 2000; a meeting of the United Nations Association of Greater Philadelphia, held in commemoration of United Nations Day in October 2000; a forum of Brussels-based non-governmental organizations, convened by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in December 2000; the concert "Rock in Rio For a Better World" held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in January 2001; and the annual luncheon of the International Rescue Committee.

E. Reaching out to and involving young people

64. The Special Representative believes that it is crucial to reach out and engage young people in advancing the agenda on children affected by armed conflict, and that children from countries at peace should share ideas and experience with children in war-affected countries, that young people can act as advocates for the millions of children who suffer in situations of armed conflict, and that young people should be encouraged to participate in decisions that affect their protection and development.

65. The Office of the Special Representative endeavours to promote communication and exchange of ideas and experience between the United Nations community and youth groups from war-affected regions. In October 2000, the Office of the Special Representative and the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations hosted a meeting with a group of Sierra Leonean war amputees, mainly children, who were in the United States for medical treatment. The meeting provided a moving encounter on the challenges confronted in rehabilitation. In July 2001, the Office of the Special Representative hosted a gathering at the United Nations of young people from the Ithutheng Trust of South Africa, enabling them to share their stories of exposure to violence and discrimination in South Africa with the United Nations and non-governmental community.

66. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to develop the Voice of Children initiative.

On-site assessments for the initiative have been completed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda. In Sierra Leone in particular, UNAMSIL Radio and the Centre for Media Training and Technology have embarked on programmes that are targeted to benefit war-affected children. Plans are now under way to provide training and to facilitate the formation of local coalitions and local production of programmes destined for war-affected children in the countries in which on-site assessments have taken place.

F. Situation on the ground and progress made in the protection of children affected by armed conflict

1. Follow-up to country visits

Northern Ireland

67. Throughout his visit to Northern Ireland in June 2000, and specifically in his meeting with representatives of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Special Representative expressed strong support for the establishment of a new body dedicated to promoting children's rights in Northern Ireland and ensuring that the concerns of young people are translated into policy-making, priority-setting and sustained resource allocation. Many ideas were discussed at that time, culminating in a proposal by the offices of the First and Deputy First Ministers, in January 2001, to appoint the Commissioner for Children in Northern Ireland. The Special Representative has written to the First and Deputy First Ministers in support of their effort to translate the Good Friday Agreement, which calls for the translation of initiatives for young people from areas affected by the troubles into action on the ground. Their proposal is particularly promising for several reasons: it is being developed through a process of consultation among governmental, civil society and non-governmental actors, it is conceived as one component of an emerging overall strategy for the protection of children in Northern Ireland and it will benefit from an examination of lessons learned from similar initiatives in other countries. A formal structure such as the one being proposed in Northern Ireland is often required to ensure that children's issues retain a high priority on the political agenda throughout the building of peace. The Office of the Special Representative will continue to work with the relevant authorities and civil society representatives on this important initiative.

Sierra Leone

68. As part of the follow-up to the visits of the Special Representative to Sierra Leone, his Office has been promoting the establishment of the National Commission for War-Affected Children in Sierra Leone, which should ensure that the concerns of children are taken into account in policy-making, priority-setting and resource allocation at the highest political level during the transition to peace. The Office is working with the Sierra Leonean Minister for Gender and Children's Affairs to open the office of the National Commission now that Parliament has approved the necessary legislation. The Special Representative will continue to seek support for the work of the Commission from United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors.

69. The Special Representative welcomes the progress that is being achieved in Sierra Leone with regard to the release of children by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). During his visit to Sierra Leone in June 1998, CDF made a commitment to refrain from recruiting children under the age of 18 years. When he visited in September 1999, the Special Representative obtained a commitment from RUF to desist from recruiting children and to release children under 18 years of age. Since that time, CDF and RUF have released children in small numbers but, increasingly, the United Nations country team and UNAMSIL are reporting compliance with the commitments. Since the rapid demobilization exercise commenced in May 2001, 1,214 children from RUF, 646 from CDF and 14 for the former Sierra Leone Armed Forces/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council have been demobilized.

Sri Lanka

70. During his visit to Sri Lanka in February 2001, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF held discussions with leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to follow up commitments that they had made to the Special Representative during his visit to the country in 1998. In those discussions, LTTE agreed to provide UNICEF and UNHCR with school records and to collaborate in tracing the whereabouts of

children missing from school, to return any child traced to an LTTE training camp within a period of two weeks and to place signs at LTTE recruitment centres indicating that the minimum enlistment age is 17 years. UNICEF is assisting in upgrading the schools in the Jaffna district and in the provision of training on child rights for LTTE. LTTE also restated its commitment to allow the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to monitor systematically compliance with their commitments.

2. Visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo

71. The Special Representative visited the democratic Republic of the Congo from 24 May to 3 June 2001 to assess first-hand the conditions of children as a result of the ongoing conflict in the country.

72. The Special Representative travelled to the provincial cities of Goma, Bukavu, Bunia, Kisangani and Kananga. At Kinshasa, he held meetings with President Joseph Kabila and several governmental ministers, and with leaders of the principal political parties and members of the diplomatic community. At Goma, he met with the leaders of Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie, headed by Adolphe Onusumba. At Bunia, he met with the leaders of Fronte pour la libération du Congo, headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba. Throughout the country, he spoke with war-affected children and communities and met with local political and military authorities, local and international humanitarian non-governmental organizations, civil society, religious leaders and United Nations agencies. At well-attended gatherings at Kinshasa, Kananga, Bunia, Bukavu, Goma and Kisangani, the Special Representative had lively and very instructive interaction with a broad cross section of civil society.

73. The Special Representative observed the direct and indirect impact of the wars which have taken a very heavy toll on children in a country in which 50 per cent of the population of some 50 million are children under 16 years of age. Hundreds of thousands of children suffer or have died from severe malnutrition and preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and measles. A recent study by the International Rescue Committee estimates that, since the outbreak of hostilities in August 1998, there have been 2.5 million deaths above the number normally expected in the eastern part of the country, the majority of the victims being children. More than one half of school-age children are not in school. The incidence of child labour has significantly increased, especially at coltan and diamond mining sites. At Bukavu, South Kivu, the Special Representative received reports of some 3,000 children working in the mines in the area. Girls have been widely exposed to sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS in the corridors of war, and are forced to serve as concubines by soldiers of various affiliations. Everywhere he went the Special Representative received consistent reports of the massive recruitment and use of child soldiers.

74. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative called for a plan of action to address the grave situation of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and made the following recommendations:

(a) **Place child protection on dialogue and peace process agendas**. Child protection and rehabilitation must become a national and subregional political priority, and should figure prominently on the agendas of the inter-Congolese dialogue and the peace process in general;

(b) **Expand the presence and humanitarian activities of MONUC**. The arrival of the MONUC military contingent and military observers, in particular, has had a striking and positive impact within Congolese society. The activities of MONUC should be expanded and strengthened in the areas that directly benefit the local populations, especially children and women; this would also further enhance the credibility of the United Nations with the Congolese people;

(c) **Provide adequate and sustained resources for protection**. The international community should reach out to the Congolese children who have suffered incredibly and unjustly and provide concrete assistance that focuses in particular on the rehabilitation of schools and health-care centres, and provide much-needed resources for the demobilization and long-term reintegration of child soldiers;

(d) **Curb child soldiering**. Children belong in schools, with their families and with their communities, and not on the battlefield. The Special Representative obtained the support of all political and military leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the following five-point programme of action for ending child soldiering:

(i) A complete stop to all recruitment and participation of those under 18 years of age in armed groups and forces;

(ii) Establishment of a mechanism to monitor and report on compliance with the above commitment;

(iii) Organization of a major public awareness campaign to sensitize the military, civil society and local communities to issues of child soldiering;

(iv) Joint visits (by MONUC, UNICEF and military authorities) to military camps and barracks to conduct surveys of child soldiers;

(v) Establishment of the necessary programmes for the reception, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

75. The important commitments made by the parties to this conflict must now be translated into concrete action that can make a difference to the lives of the children. Political and military leaders must demonstrate the necessary political will and deliver on their commitments. Efforts should be made to:

(a) **Improve the monitoring of commitments**. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo underscores the relevance of the Special Representative's current proposal to establish an independent observatory to monitor the conduct of the parties in conflict in relation to their obligations and commitments for the protection of children. The Democratic Republic of the Congo should be one of the pilot countries in this initiative;

(b) **Foster a subregional approach to child protection**. A neighbourhood initiative is required at the subregional level to address cross-border issues, such as child soldiering and abduction, trafficking and cross-border displacement of children. Children are being recruited and abducted from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to neighbouring countries for training, and then brought back to fight. Similarly, children from the neighbouring countries are being recruited and abducted to fight in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;

(c) **Improve data collection and research**. The dearth of reliable information on the impact of the wars on children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo highlights the importance of setting up a coordinated network to ensure more effective and systematic information and data collection on the impact of war on children and on the most effective means and methods to intervene for their protection and rehabilitation. The Democratic Republic of the Congo should serve as one of the first case studies for the proposed research agenda;

(d) **Ensure that attention is given to the special needs of girls**. A programme is needed to address the special needs of sexually abused and exploited girls. This should include measures to meet their health needs, provide trauma counselling and sensitize local communities;

(e) **Build local capacity for child protection and advocacy**. The United Nations system, international non-governmental organizations and the donor community need to do a lot more to link their efforts more closely with local actors and local communities, since it is the best way to build local capacity for protection and advocacy;

(f) **Reinforce traditional values**. All necessary support should be extended to the elders, local chiefs, teachers, local civil society and religious institutions working to reclaim and reinforce the local norms and values that traditionally have provided protection for civilian populations, especially children and women, but which have been radically undermined by the war;

(g) **Take measures to end the plunder of natural resources**. Everywhere the Special Representative went, the children and their parents called for an end to the war and an end to the plunder of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The widespread and systematic looting of diamonds, gold, coltan, timber and coffee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, by all concerned, is a disgrace which is entirely unacceptable. It robs the Congolese children of their birthright and of resources that should be used for their education, health care and development, and has also become an incentive and fuel for the continuation of the war. The Special Representative calls on the Expert Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to link its findings and recommendations to the impact on children. He welcomed the announcement by the airline consortium of Sabena and Swissair of an embargo on the transport of coltan and all related

minerals from all points of its operations in eastern Africa.

76. In conclusion, the Special Representative was particularly impressed and encouraged by the commitment of all sectors of Congolese society to preserve their national unity, by the strength and engagement of civil society throughout the country, and by the resilience and determination of local communities and young people. A united, peaceful and vigorous country is good for Congolese children, it is good for the development and future of Africa and it is good for international peace and security.

3. Curbing child soldiering

77. The need to end the use of children as soldiers remains a priority issue as well as a key challenge for the Special Representative. During armed conflict, the Special Representative works with key partners to elicit a commitment from armed groups and forces to refrain from recruiting children and to demobilize those currently within their ranks. In addition, his Office advocates, together with UNICEF and other United Nations partners, the inclusion of a specific component concerning child soldiers in all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

78. In March 2001, the Government of Japan requested from the Office of the Special Representative a survey of past experience in programmes for the reintegration of child soldiers. The survey, which was completed in July 2001, resulted in recommendations that emphasize, inter alia, the need for local capacity-building projects to ensure long-term reintegration at the community level. The Office will be working to follow up these recommendations in particular countries over the forthcoming year.

79. The Special Representative believes that it is critical to address the root causes of the participation of children in armed conflicts. Beyond the forced recruitment and abduction of young people into fighting forces, factors that motivate enlistment by children include ideological influence, poverty and lack of access to schooling or economically viable vocational opportunities. While international standards primarily seek to curtail the conduct of those who recruit children, it is known that, in many devastated, impoverished, highly polarized or ideologically charged environments, children are lured into joining in hostilities for reasons other than forced recruitment. The Special Representative continues to draw attention to the cross-border dimensions of child abduction, recruitment and deployment, and has proposed "neighbourhood approaches" to this problem.

80. Local and international actors often lack the resources, the programme structures and the breadth of information required to cope with either spontaneous or very large demobilizations and family reunifications of child soldiers and the challenges of their long-term social reintegration. There is an urgent need to provide greater resources and capacity on the ground for this purpose.

81. During his visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as indicated above, the Special Representative continued to urge parties to the conflict to take credible steps to end the recruitment of children and to ensure the demobilization and reintegration of those in their ranks. His five-point demobilization programme for ending child soldiering, accepted by all parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was described in paragraph 74 (d) above.

82. When 165 Congolese children were taken from Bunia, Beni and Butembo to Uganda for military training at the end of 2000, MONUC child protection advisers and UNICEF helped to facilitate their release from the Ugandan army training camp and their placement in a transit camp in Uganda. The Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF worked together to draw the attention of the Security Council to this matter. Subsequently, the Security Council, in resolution 1341 (2001) of 22 February 2001, demanded that all armed forces and groups concerned bring an effective end to the recruitment, training and use of children in their armed forces. Despite successful efforts to reunify these children with their families in July and August 2001, concern for their re-recruitment persists among their parents and families.

83. In August 2001, the Office of the Special Representative briefed the mapping and programming mission of donors, led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was en route to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region to review the situation with a view to developing initiatives for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The Office stressed the importance of considering child soldiers as a component of each armed force or group, rather than as a distinct category,

and emphasized the importance of long-term and comprehensive planning and programming. Such an approach, the Office argued, would help to ensure that the children's experiences and needs were consistently factored into the political, military, social and economic analysis and programming. This approach was fully endorsed by the UNDP-led mission.

84. Following discussions held between the Special Representative and the Head of the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), the latter successfully pursued with the Government of Guinea-Bissau the release of 603 children under the age of 18 years, who were serving in the national army. The Special Representative welcomes this development and will work with UNOGBIS, UNICEF and other partners to help to ensure the early and effective demobilization and reintegration of these children into society.

G. Developing a research agenda to fill gaps in knowledge

85. From the outset of his mandate, the Special Representative has identified the need to fill critical gaps in knowledge concerning the nature and scope of the impact of armed conflict and the need for better coordination of available knowledge on the issue. This will strengthen the work being done by policy makers to advance the protection and rehabilitation of children who are caught up in situations of armed conflict. In 2000, the Special Representative proposed a research agenda, entitled "Filling knowledge gaps, a research agenda on the impact of armed conflict on children", which identified knowledge gaps in four main areas: current trends in warfare affecting children; reliable, disaggregated data on children affected by armed conflict; cultural norms and values that are meant to protect children in times of armed conflict; and impact assessments of programme interventions and lessons learned, including the development of indicators. The idea, structure and focus of an international research network were discussed extensively with UNICEF and other United Nations partners, non-governmental organizations and several research institutions.

86. With the generous sponsorship of the Government of Italy, the Office of the Special Representative, in collaboration with the Italian National Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre and the Social Science Research Council, convened a workshop in Florence, Italy, in July 2001 to discuss the research agenda. The workshop brought together for the first time an unusual combination of policy makers, practitioners, advocates and researchers, drawn from a range of governmental and United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, foundations, research institutes and universities throughout the world. The participants focused on the ways in which a stronger knowledge base could help to alleviate the plight of war-affected children.

87. The workshop succeeded in accomplishing its principal aims, namely: to develop an agenda and plan of action for research on the impact of armed conflict on children; to mobilize a research network that would deepen the links among various institutions and constituencies; and to ensure that research outcome and products are responsive to practical needs and can help to inform and strengthen policy-making and action.

88. At the workshop, agreement was reached on the establishment of a research network that would be an independent, decentralized group coordinated by a secretariat based at the Social Science Research Council in New York. The network will seek to incorporate the needs of the various actors in this field, and promote exchange of ideas and information, collaboration and coordination among them. Moreover, the network should inform and strengthen policy and practice in this field. Finally, the network would directly involve the participation of war-affected communities and build capacity in the areas affected by conflict.

89. Now that the research network has reached an advanced stage of planning and design, further coordination functions and management will shift to the Social Science Research Council, with which the Office of the Special Representative will maintain a close working relationship. The following are some of the steps that will need to be taken in follow-up to the workshop: establishment of appropriate structures for the network; creation of a web site on children affected by armed conflict that will provide access to information from various institutions and links to related web sites; preparation of a comprehensive inventory of current and past research projects carried out by individuals and institutions; establishment of thematic task forces on specific themes that will draw upon regional capacities with regard to children affected by armed conflict and strengthen them by

assisting regional networks on children and armed conflict.

H. Promoting collaboration within the United Nations system

90. The Office of the Special Representative played an important and catalytic role in the formation of two informal inter-agency working groups intended to serve the cause of child protection within the United Nations system: one is the working group on child protection training for United Nations peacekeeping personnel, in which United Nations and non-governmental partners participate, and the other is the working group on the incorporation of child protection into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes. The Office also participates in the West African task force led by the Department of Political Affairs, in which it has been working with other United Nations departments and agencies to implement the recommendations of the inter-agency mission to West Africa in March 2001.

91. In July 2001, the Special Representative participated in the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, which focused on the sustainable development of Africa and the role of the United Nations system. He made a presentation on "The nexus between peace and development: a way forward for the United Nations to work in Africa", highlighting the need to include the agenda on children affected by armed conflict in any effort aimed at achieving sustainable peace and development in Africa.

United Nations Children's Fund

92. During the reporting period, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative have continued the practice of holding regular consultations to review ongoing and upcoming issues and initiatives.

93. In addition to the collaborative efforts invested by the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF in the preparation of the second report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict and the relevant aspects of the special session of the General Assembly on children, a number of joint initiatives were discussed and pursued by the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF throughout the reporting period. As mentioned earlier, a joint appeal was sent by the Special Representative and the Executive Director of UNICEF to heads of State and Government urging signature and ratification of the Optional Protocol. Efforts have been coordinated to follow up and urge compliance with the commitments made to the Special Representative by parties to armed conflict. UNICEF is a key partner in the discussion and development of the research agenda and network proposed by the Special Representative. Joint efforts to collaborate on the implementation of the Cotounou Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Union are being planned. Efforts to improve collaboration in the preparation of the Special Representative's country visits are under way.

94. The Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF undertook a review of the child protection adviser experience in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The results of this review will serve as input for the informal inter-agency working group on the incorporation of child protection into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes. The findings of the joint review have begun to influence how the Office and UNICEF propose candidates for recruitment as child protection advisers. Collaboration on issues of children affected by armed conflict that are relevant to the special session on children has been extensive and fruitful: the draft outcome document of the special session, on a world fit for children, contains important recommendations for the agenda on children affected by armed conflict, many joint events were convened during the sessions of the Preparatory Committee, and several significant joint initiatives were planned for the special session itself.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations

95. The Office of the Special Representative works closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations both at Headquarters and in the context of peacekeeping operations in the field. The Office of the Special Representative participates actively in several working groups and task forces convened by the Department, including those on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and on Sierra Leone. The Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF work closely in submitting joint proposals to the Department regarding the inclusion of child protection staff in particular peacekeeping operations, such as UNAMSIL and MONUC. Thereafter, the Office and UNICEF

continue to collaborate to propose to the Department particular candidates for child protection posts. Once child protection advisers are deployed to the field, the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF work to provide any necessary guidance or support, and to ensure that their observations and findings are considered within the appropriate forums, including task forces led by the Department and reports submitted by the Secretary-General to the Security Council.

96. As described earlier the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and the Department of Political Affairs have agreed to work as co-convenors of an inter-agency group on the incorporation of child protection into peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes. As noted above, the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF are working in close collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the preparation of child protection training materials for peacekeeping personnel. In addition, the Department has involved the Office of the Special Representative in developing child-conscious operating procedures for the investigation and follow-up of allegations of abuse attributed to peacekeeping personnel and involving children as victims or witnesses. Finally the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has participated in the development of plans to launch a research network on children and armed conflict and has expressed its willingness to provide access to field sites for relevant and appropriate research purposes, to continue to participate in workshops, and to take an active role in framing the research questions that would result in the compilation of information that would be useful to peacekeeping staff.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

97. In March 2001, the Office of the Special Representative participated in a mission to northern Uganda and the Sudan, led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In its resolution 2000/60 of 26 April 2000, on the abduction of children from northern Uganda,[2] the Commission on Human Rights requested the Office of the High Commissioner to undertake an assessment of the situation on the ground in the affected areas, including the needs of the victims. From 17 March to 6 April 2001, the mission travelled to Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda.

98. The mission met with many representatives of the Government of Uganda, the Government of the Sudan, relevant United Nations agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, traditional leaders and religious leaders. The mission also met and interviewed many children and adults who had recently escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army. The report of the mission is currently being finalized by the Office of the High Commissioner.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

99. The Office of the Special Representative provided background information and briefing papers to the members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in advance of their deliberations on Guatemala and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. the Office outlined key issues that might be addressed during the Committee's review of those countries' periodic reports, and ensured that the Committee secretariat received the reports on child rights and protection that had been prepared during 2000 by child protection advisers with MONUC. The presence of child protection advisers within MONUC and UNAMSIL should help to ensure a flow of up-to-date information from the field to the Committee.

Notes

[1] The adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex, and 54/263, annex I, respectively) and the classification of war crimes against children in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (A/CONF.183/9) are particularly significant.

[2] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 3* and corrigendum (E/2000/23 and Corr.1), chap. II, sect. A.